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Memoir

of

General Montgomery

By Captain C. W. Allen

of

Montgomery Lodge, No. 19, F. & A. M.

1912

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Memoir of General Montgomery

After whom Montgomery Lodge, No. 19, F. & A. M., Philadelphia, Pa., is named

[Read before Clinton A. Sowers, Esq., W. M., and the members of the Lodge on May 2, 1912, by Captain C. W. Allen, Canadian Infantry (retired), formerly of The Globe Editorial Staff, Toronto, and later of the Department of the Interior, Ottawa.]

Worshipful Master, Officers, and Brethren of Montgomery Lodge: It is just twelve months since, being desirous of enjoying Masonic status in Philadelphia, it was suggested to me by Brother M. Henry Green, M.D., a P. M., of Chester Lodge, No. 236, that the interesting history of your Lodge, especially in its military relations, would strongly appeal to one of my temperament. He was good enough to vouch for me as a M. M. and to introduce me to many of your members, his personal popularity no doubt contributing greatly to the cordiality of the welcome, as a visiting brother from afar, then extended to me. My petition for affiliation having been favorably reported, I was elected a member of Montgomery Lodge last September, and have since had every reason to feel grateful for admission to an organization in which the exalted principles of the Craft find the fullest exemplification in practice.

The interest which I found in studying the history of the Lodge by our late Brother George Griscom, P. M.,

as briefly set forth in the appendix to its by-laws, and more fully in the work by our late Bro. Alex. H. Morgan, P. M., left me unsatisfied on one point—the very meagre references to General Montgomery, whose name was prefixed to "No. 19" in 1836 by authority of the R. W. Grand Lodge. My researches in the library of the Masonic Temple, and in that of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, whetted my appetite to learn still more; and I then drew upon the resources of the Philadelphia Free Library and those of its West Philadelphia branch. The material thus collected from various authorities I now present to you almost in the very words of the historians and biographers to whom I am thus indebted; and here let me state that I have been impressed with a strong sense of the accuracy and impartiality of those standard works by American writers which I consulted, though I regret I cannot express an equally favorable opinion of the results of the labors of the authors of the school text books generally in use in the United States, from which unhappily the majority of the citizens have acquired such knowledge as most of them possess of the history of this great country.

Major-General Richard Montgomery was born in Swords, near Feltrim, County of Dublin, Ireland, December 2, 1736, being third son of Thomas Montgomery, M. P. for Lifford; and it is an interesting fact that Brother Jas. F. Montgomery, of this Lodge, has

actually been in the bedroom where our hero first saw the light. Richard was educated at St. Andrew's and Trinity College, Dublin; and on September 21, 1756, was appointed ensign in the 17th Regiment of Foot, in which he became subsequently lieutenant and captain. He served with his regiment under Colonel (afterwards General) Haviland at the siege and capture from the French by the British of Louisburg, Cape Breton, in 1757, and in the expedition against the French posts on Lake Champlain in 1759. After the fall of Montreal he was present with his regiment at the capture of Martinique, in the West Indies, and later at the siege and capture of Havana by the British forces. At the peace of 1763 he went with his regiment to New York, and in 1765 returned home with it. While at home he appears to have made the acquaintance of Col. Isaac Barré, Edmund Burke, Charles Fox, and other men of strong Liberal views. He sold out of the army* in 1772, and bought a farm of sixty-seven acres at King's Bridge, now a part of the City of New York. Soon after he married Jane, daughter of Judge R. R. Livingstone, of New York, but left no issue. His widow survived "my soldier," as she called him, fifty-three years, dying in 1828.

The events leading to Richard Montgomery's design of settling in America have always been involved in some

[*Note—Under the system which prevailed then, and for over one hundred years after, officers purchased their commissions.]

obscurity; but the following letter written from England to an intimate friend, printed in the New York Genealogical and Biographical Record in 1871, may give the whole clue to his resolve to emigrate. He writes:—

"You no doubt will be surprised when I tell you I have taken the resolution of quitting the service and dedicating the rest of my life to husbandry, for which I have of late conceived a violent passion—a passion I am determined to indulge in quitting the career of glory for the substantial comforts of independence. My frequent disappointments in respect to preferment, the little prospect of future advancement to a man who has no friends able or willing to serve him, the mortification of seeing those of more interest getting before one, the little chance of having anything to do in the way of my profession, and that time of life approaching when rambling has no longer its charms have confirmed me in the indulgence of my inclination. And, as a man with little money cuts but a bad figure in this country among peers, nabobs, etc., etc., I have cast my eyes on America, where my pride and poverty will be much more at their ease. This is an outline of my future plans."

The tenor of the foregoing is borne out and confirmed in another letter—one of the last he ever penned—to his father-in-law, Judge Livingstone, dated at "Headquarters before Quebec, December 16, 1775," only two weeks before his tragic death as will hereafter be related. Thus he wrote:

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"Should my good fortune give me success, I shall return home as soon as possible. I have lost the ambition which once sweetened a military life—a sense of duty is the only spring of action. I must leave the field to those who have a more powerful incentive. I think our affairs at present are in so prosperous a situation that I may venture to indulge myself in that sort of life which alone gives me pleasure. Should the scene change, I shall always be ready to contribute my mite to the public safety."

In thus speaking of "our affairs," he must clearly have been referring to the prosperous situation of the revolutionary government rather than to any hopeful prospect he may have perceived in his operations before Quebec. Alas for him and his adopted country, what a change a fortnight brought to those bright dreams of release from duties! Yet the concluding sentence in this letter to his father-in-law betrays the principal cause of his failure in the attack on Quebec, the force of which, perhaps, his unflinching spirit underestimated. Speaking of his small army, he writes: "The unhappy passion for going home which prevails among the troops has left me almost too weak to undertake the business I am about." But this is anticipating an explanation of causes which will come later on.

In 1775 Montgomery was sent as a delegate to the first Provincial Congress at New York, and in June of

the same year, "sadly and reluctantly," as he said, he consented to be made a brigadier-general in the Continental army, ranking second among the eight appointed and being the only one not a native of New England. He consoled himself with the reflection that, as he expressed it, "the will of an oppressed people, compelled to choose between liberty and slavery, must be respected." He parted with his young wife at Saratoga, and started as second in command of the expedition under Major-General Philip Schuyler, which was instructed "to take possession of St. John's and Montreal, and pursue any other measures in Canada to promote the furtherance and safety of the American cause."

Meantime Schuyler, though confined to his bed on account of serious illness, had sent out on the 10th day of September, 1775, a party of five hundred; they returned on the eleventh, as his report says, "disgraced by unbecoming behavior." Upon this Montgomery, having discerned in the men a rising spirit more consonant with his own, entreated permission to retrieve the late disasters, and Schuyler, who was put into a covered boat for Ticonderoga, turned his back on the scene with regret, but not with envy, and relinquished to the gallant Irishman the conduct, the danger, and the glory of the campaign. Montgomery's chief difficulties grew out of the badness of the troops. Schuyler had already complained of the Connecticut soldiers, announcing even to

Congress: "If Job had been a general in my situation, his memory had not been so famous for patience." "The New Englanders," wrote Montgomery, "are the worst stuff possible for soldiers. They are homesick; their regiments are melted away, and yet not a man dead of any distemper. There is such an equality among them that the officers have no authority, and there are very few among them in whose spirit I have confidence. The privates are all generals, but not soldiers, and so jealous that it is impossible, though a man risk his person, to escape the imputation of treachery."

It seems that New England men were temperamentally disinclined to engagements which would take them far from home on wages to be paid in a constantly depreciating currency; besides, the Continental bills were remitted so tardily and in such inadequate amounts that even those wages were not paid with regularity, and this negligence threatened the "destruction of the army." For want of funds to pay the accounts of the commissary and quartermaster the troops were forced to submit to reduced allowances. Washington himself felt keenly the habitual inattention of Congress and its agents, and the sense of suffering wrongfully and needlessly engendered discontent in his camp. The Connecticut soldiers, whose enlistment expired early in December, were determined to leave the service.

Washington would have had Trumbull make an example of the deserters, but Trumbull answered, "The pulse of a New England man beats high for liberty; his engagement in the service he thinks purely voluntary. He thinks himself not further holden. This is the genius and spirit of our people."

Yet amid all his vexations Montgomery's reputation steadily rose throughout the country, and he won the affection of his army; so that every sick soldier, officer, or deserter who passed home agreed in praising him wherever he stopped.*

Montgomery's expedition aroused great resentment in Canada, as Congress a short time before had expressly

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[*NOTE—The foregoing criticisms are quoted, practically verbatim, from American historians in order that Montgomery's peculiar qualities may be duly estimated. If I may here be pardoned a digression, I would like to venture an opinion that the public generally have very little knowledge, and even less appreciation, of the debt of gratitude owing to the patriotic services of the officers of the National Guard, that valuable organization which is at all times subject to call in support of the civil authorities in any emergency, and ever ready to swell the thin ranks of the regular army should the United States unhappily again be engaged in a foreign war. No one who has not had personal experience can possibly imagine the effort required of company commanders in keeping the ranks full and the men fairly efficient during "these piping times of peace" —how much tact, forbearance, self-abnegation and control of temper, to say nothing of pecuniary expenditure, is required on their part to attain these objects. I know whereof I speak, for I soon found the difference, after serving in the regular Canadian troops formerly composing the garrison at Winnipeg, when, on their disbandment, I was appointed to command the first company of infantry (Volunteer Militia) authorized for that city. I then realized that I could no longer say with the Roman centurion (Matthew VIII, 9) "For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it," What then must have been Montgomery's feelings, after his military experience of several years as an officer of regular troops, when he accepted a command over the undisciplined raw levies put into the field by Congress or individual States!]

disavowed any intention of such an invasion, and had caused this disavowal to be widely circulated there. The Americans took Isle aux Noir, but failed at St. John's. Supplies were bad and desertion rife. Nevertheless, Montgomery took Fort Chamblai, where was a stock of ammunition of which the Americans were in much need, and afterwards captured St. John's, a more important conquest—where were taken, among other spoil, the colors of the British Royal Fusiliers, the first regimental colors taken in the war. "Till Quebec is taken, Canada remains unconquered," Montgomery wrote to Congress. In December, 1775, he effected a junction with Colonel Benedict Arnold at Point aux Trembles, and laid siege to Quebec.

* * * * * *

Now Quebec was the strongest fortress in America, and at no time during the siege did the besiegers' number exceed that of the garrison, which was eighteen hundred strong, including five hundred and fifty Canadians, the whole being under the command of the Governor, Sir Guy Carleton, K. C. B. Colonel Arnold, so soon as he was reinforced by Montgomery's corps, without waiting for that general, who marched more slowly, appeared before Quebec at the head of nine hundred Provincials and some Canadians under Colonel Livingston, an American. The fidelity of the upper classes to British interests left the latter headless, so that they

were now led by alien chiefs. Montgomery's design was not to besiege Quebec in the usual form, as he was totally unprovided with engineers and siege artillery, but rather to choose a favorable occasion for an unexpected assault upon the most promising point of the defences, feint attacks being delivered simultaneously by columns led by Colonel Arnold and two other commanders against other parts.

It certainly was no easy matter to surprise a strongly fortified place, defended by a vigilant garrison. A desire to terminate by a crowning success the series of fortunate hits he had been able to give the British since he entered their colony perhaps blinded the perceptions of Montgomery to the perils attending his present enterprise. It has also been suggested that he desired to emulate the astonishing exploit of Wolfe, in whose army he had served. An auspicious moment for assaulting the place successfully might arrive, but it had to be waited for; and, besides his paucity of forces, he was not properly supplied with money and was short of provisions. His men, poorly clothed and unaccustomed to the severity of a Lower Canadian winter, were already afflicted with small pox, a disease which soon spread among them and continued to decimate their ranks to the last. As if these material wants and physical evils were not enough to cause the hazardous enterprise to miscarry, an additional source of weakness was opened up through

dissensions between Colonel Arnold and his officers. Again, the Canadians who had joined the American ranks, or who favored the pretensions of Congress, began to perceive that they would have to play a secondary, even a subservient, part as the struggle against British domination progressed. The Americans now among them, to begin with, decided everything without consulting the inhabitants; they nominated officials, convoked public meetings, etc., without asking Canadian assent upon any occasion. The royalists were not slow to profit by this turn in the tide of public feeling.

The prudence of General Montgomery, so long as he lived, much contributed to prevent an explosion of hostile feeling against his people by the Canadians, who began to express an opinion that it were better to obey one's own chief, under whatever form of general government, than to be indebted for political freedom to aliens. Montgomery certainly manifested great address in managing the different orders of men whom he dealt with, being especially careful not to awaken fears of change in the most sensitive of all—the privileged classes. He enjoined on his men constant respect for the Catholic religion and its ministers. He promised freedom of worship for all, and protection to the existing religious foundations. To bring about a favourable reaction in the Canadian mind Montgomery discerned no other

means than to capture Quebec and annihilate the royalism therein concentred. This feat he determined to essay by nocturnal *escalade*, only waiting for a night of uuusual darkness to plant his ladders unobserved by the garrison.

Montgomery divided his scanty force into four attacking columns, one of which was led by himself, another by Colonel Arnold. At four o'clock, December 31st, two rockets ascended and immediately several responsive signals, from the other corps, were perceived by the sentinels on the ramparts, who forthwith gave the alarm. When the Americans arrived at the ramparts of the landward side of the city they were received with a heavy fire of musketry, which they were not slow in returning. Meanwhile Montgomery was moving onward with his (the largest) column, which took much time to defile, for the path along which it had to pass was very narrow, in some places two men not being able to march abreast between cliff and strand, besides the way being encumbered with ice blocks and wreaths of newly-fallen snow. He nevertheless cleared all obstructions and reached the outer barrier of Pres de Ville, through which he passed without difficulty; but, on attaining the next, he was confronted by a masked battery, mounted with seven cannon and manned by a guard fifty strong under a Captain Chabot. The artillerymen within stood beside their guns with lighted matches, all ready to apply

them and send a shower of grape so soon as the foe came near.

Montgomery was astounded on finding such preparations made for giving him a hot reception, being unaware that his plans for an assault had been betrayed to the Governor by deserters. Halting within fifty yards of the battery, he turned round, seemingly to confer hastily with the officers behind him, and then, followed by the latter and their men, suddenly sprang towards the battery, when Chabot gave orders to fire. The discharge that followed proved destructive; cries and groans, which suddenly arose, proved its efficiency. Montgomery himself, his two aides-de-camp, with several other officers and a number of their men, lay on the ground, some killed outright or writhing in agony from mortal or other wounds. Colonel Campbell, upon whom the chief command of Montgomery's column now devolved, finding that his men were discouraged by the loss of their general and so many of their comrades, thought it would be useless to reform his disordered ranks for a second attempt to force the perilous pass. He turned heel, and fled with the utmost precipitation.

The other attacks, partly successful at first, ultimately failed. All the survivors of Arnold's column remained in the hands of the Governor, the commander himself being badly wounded. The loss of the Americans was great in prisoners, and the death of

Montgomery was an irreparable calamity for their cause.

The corpse of that general, along with the bodies of twelve others, was next day disengaged from snow heaps at a little distance from the barrier which he had attempted to enter. Some of the captured American officers, unconscious of the fate of their chief, having recognized his sword in the hands of an officer of the garrison, were moved at sight of it and divined the loss that had befallen them. The Governor, on his part, showed sympathy for them and his own regard for the memory of Montgomery by interring his remains with military honors, the obsequies being attended by the Governor and his staff and many of the officers of the garrison.

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It is not necessary here to follow in detail the further incidents of this American invasion of Canada, which terminated unsuccessfully after numerous engagements undecisive of the campaign. General Wooster took chief command in place of Colonel Arnold, who first succeeded to it on the death of Montgomery. Wooster was superseded in May, 1776, by General Thomas. Later General Sullivan arrived with reinforcements and took command of the whole. It was under General Sullivan that Colonel Thomas Procter, the first W. M. of Lodge No. 19 of whom we have record, after-

wards fought at the Battle of Brandywine, where Lafayette received his first wound.

At the time of his death, General Montgomery was in the first month of his fortieth year. He was tall and slender, well limbed, of a graceful address, and had a strong and active frame. He could endure fatigue and all changes and severities of climate. His judgment was cool, though he kindled in action, imparting confidence and sympathetic courage. Never himself negligent of duty, never avoiding danger, discriminating and energetic, he had the power of conducting freemen by their voluntary love and esteem. An experienced soldier, he was also well versed in letters, particularly in natural science. In private life he was a good husband, brother, and son, an amiable and faithful friend. The rectitude of his heart shone forth in his actions, which were habitually and unaffectedly directed by a nice moral sense. He overcame difficulties which others shunned to encounter. Foes and friends paid tribute to his worth.

At the news of his death "the whole city of Philadelphia was in tears; every person seemed to have lost his nearest relative or heart friend." In the British Parliament the great defenders of liberty vied with each other in his praise. Barré, his veteran fellow soldier in the late war against France, Edmund Burke, and others spoke in praise of "the movements" as the latter said,

"of the hero who in a single campaign had conquered two-thirds of Canada." "I" replied Lord North, leader of the Government, "cannot join in lamenting the death of Montgomery as a public loss. He was brave, he was able, he was humane, he was generous; but still he was only a brave, humane, and generous rebel. Curse on his virtues; they've undone his country!" "The term of rebel," retorted Fox, "is no certain mark of disgrace. All the great assertors of liberty, the saviours of their country, the benefactors of mankind in all ages, have been called rebels. We owe the constitution which enables us to sit in this House (the House of Commons) to a rebellion." So passed away the spirit of Montgomery, with the love of all who knew him, the grief of the nascent republic, and the eulogies of the world!

Congress, "desiring to transmit to future ages the patriotic conduct, enterprise, and prowess of Montgomery," voted that a memorial in marble should be erected to him in the graveyard of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, New York. The memorial was ordered in Paris by Benjamin Franklin. In 1818 Congress passed an "Act of Honor," by which permission of the Canadian Government was obtained for the removal of Montgomery's remains, which were then laid in St. Paul's Church, New York. An inscription on the rocks at Cape Diamond (Quebec) still shows the spot where he fell.

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I was for a while somewhat puzzled over an apparent discrepancy, for Lodge No. 19 did not obtain authority to take the name of "Montgomery" until 1836—eighteen years after Congress had paid such exceptional honors to the deceased hero. When, however, I happened to notice that 1836 was the one-hundreth anniversary of his birth, the otherwise unexplained delay seems satisfactorily accounted for.

As probably no really great man has ever altogether escaped detractors, it is well to mention how Parkman, the historian, states that some writers have confused Richard Montgomery, ignorantly and most unjustly, with Capt. Alexander Montgomery (his elder brother), 43d Regiment, who incurred the censure of his brother officers for inhumanity to some prisoners that fell into his hands when serving under Wolfe before Quebec.

Brethren, my task is done. I trust I have succeeded in showing that the gallant and distinguished officer after whom Lodge No. 19 is named was a soldier *sans peur et sans reproche*, not unworthy indeed to be classed with the famous Roman general Cincinnatus, who, when called upon by a delegation of his fellow citizens to lead their armies against savage hordes, was found by them with his hands upon the plough; or with that great man of whom it has been said he was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his fellow-countrymen." Nevertheless this effort would be incomplete if I failed

to mention how, at the Centennial Banquet of the Lodge in 1887, R. W. Deputy Grand Master Bro. Clifford P. MacCalla, responding to a toast, gave utterance to the following impressive sentiments respecting the subject of this Memoir, which furnish a highly appropriate conclusion thereto. He said:

"In the British Parliament the eloquence of a Chatham and of a Burke paid tribute to his valour and his worth. Brethren, cherish the name of your Lodge, for there is none nobler! 'No. 19' is happily married to 'Montgomery.' Patriotism and Masonry have been conjoined, and what has thus been united let not Masons ever put asunder!"

[NOTE—The author of the above Memoir desires to make his grateful acknowledgments to the following standard works of reference, as the chief sources of the material he has presented in connected form, viz.: Bancroft's History of the United States, Vol. VIII; Sparks' Library of American Biography; Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XXXVIII; Appleton's Cyclopædia of American Biography, Vol. IV; History of Canada, Vol II, Second Edition, by Andrew Bell, published by John Lovell, Montreal, 1862. The narrative of the siege of Quebec and of the tragic death of General Montgomery, as it appears between the two lines of asterisks, is quoted almost verbatim from the last-mentioned authority, as furnishing the most complete account of those interesting incidents available.]

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